

THE
B U L L
OF
POPE GREGORY XVI.

19

COMMANDING ALL PRIMATES, ARCHBISHOPS BISH-
OPS. THROUGHOUT THE UNIVERSE, TO
EXERT ALL THEIR INFLUENCE
TO PREVENT THE CIRCU-
LATION AND READING
OF THE

B I B L E !

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Preface.

The following Papal Bull issued by Pope Gregory the 16th, will show the absolute necessity which now exists for active, strenuous and uncompromising resistance by the American people, to the bold undisguised and imprudent assumptions of this *Foreign Potentate*.

All Bible Societies are openly and bitterly denounced, the circulation of the Holy Bible is to be suppressed. All translations and interpretations of it are forbidden, and the civil governments, more especially those in the Romish States, are solemnly invoked to aid in this mighty crusade against the word of God. The faithful (that is the votaries of Rome) are called upon to assist in this great work of the infalliable head, of the infallible Church, and who can doubt their willingness and zeal. Let each American citizen read this tyrannical document carefully, reflect, and judge whether we are not on the verge of a great and terrible crisis.

BULL
OF
THE POPE.

ANOTHER BULL OF THE POPE AGAINST THE BIBLE SOCIETIES
OF THE UNITED STATES.

*Circular Letter from His Holiness the Pope—To all Patri-
archs, Primates, Archbishops and Bishops.*

VENERABLE BROTHERS, health and greeting Apostolical:—
Amongst the many attempts which the enemies of Catholicism, under whatever denomination they may appear, are daily making in our age, to reduce the truly faithful, and deprive them of the holy instructions of the faith, (*less saints enseignements de la foi*) the efforts of those Bible Societies are conspicuous, which, originally established in England, and propagated throughout the universe, labor everywhere to disseminate the books of the Holy Scriptures, translated into the vulgar tongue; consign them to the private interpretation of each, alike among Christians and amongst Infidels; continue what St. Jerome formerly complained of—pretending to popularize the holy pages, and render them intelligible, without the aid of any interpreter, to persons of every condition, to the most loquacious woman, to the light-headed old man (*viellard delerant*), to the worldly cavalier (*verbeux sophiste*), to all, in short, and even by an absurdity as great as unheard of, to the most hardened infidels.

You are but too well aware, my reverend brethren, to what the efforts of these Societies tend. You know what is revealed in the Holy Scriptures, and what is the advice of St. Peter the Prince of the Apostles—

After having quoted the Epistles of St. Paul—they contain, says he, many things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other Scriptures, unto their own destruction. Then you know what he adds: Ye, therefore, beloved, seeing you know these things, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness. 2d Peter, c. iii. v. 16, 17.

You see what was even in the earliest times of the Church, the appropriate artifices of heretics; and now, discarding divine tradition and Catholic enlightenment, they already strove to either materially interpolate the sacred text or to corrupt its true interpretation. You are also aware with what caution and wisdom the words of the Lord ought to be translated into another tongue, and yet, nothing is more common than to see these versions multiplied, to admit either through imprudence or malice, the grave errors of so many interpreters—errors which dissemble too frequently, by their multiplicity and variety, to the misery of souls. So far as these Societies are concerned, it matters little

whether those who read the Holy Books, translated into vulgar language, fall into this or that error.—They only care audaciously to stimulate all to a private interpretation of the divine oracles to inspire contempt for divine traditions, which the Catholic Church preserves upon the authority of the holy fathers—in a word, to cause them to reject even the authority of the Church herself. This is the reason why the Bible Societies care not to calumniate her (the Church) and the august throne of St. Peter, as if she had wished for ages to deprive the faithful of the knowledge of the Holy Books, when the most forcible evidence will prove the immemorial and particular care which the Sovereign Pontiffs even down to the most modern times, and in conjunction with their Catholic Pastors, have taken to ground the people in the Word of God, whether written or delivered by tradition.

In the first place, it is known that, by the decrees of the Holy Councils of Trent, Bishops are enjoined to see that the Holy Scriptures and Divine Laws be more frequently taught in their dioceses. It is known that, even exceeding the prescriptions of the Council of Latern (1215,) the Council of Trent recommends that there should be in the several cathedral churches and colleges of the towns and cantons a stipend provided for a Doctor of Divinity, and that none should be appointed to that office, but a man fully competent to teach and expound the Holy Scripture. It is known how frequently, in the provincial councils which followed this prebendary, founded upon the decree of the Council of Trent, was mentioned, and how often the instructions which the canon entrusted with this office should deliver to the clergy and people, were taken into consideration.

The same disposition (to instruct the people in the Word of God) was especially observable in the Council of Rome in the year 1725, to which our predecessor, Benedict XIII., of happy memory, summoned not only all the Prelates of the Romish Church, but even a great number of Archbishops, Bishops, and other ordinaries immediately subject to the Holy See. The same desire animated the Roman Pontiff of whom we have been speaking, to the various edicts which he issued and addressed to all the Bishops of Italy and the neighboring islands. In short, you yourselves, my venerable brethren, who are in the habit of forwarding to the Holy See, at stated intervals, everything calculated to interest religion—you know, by the repeated answers which our Congregational Council has returned hitherto yourselves or your predecessors, how much the Holy Romish Church rejoices, in concert with the Bishops, when they have in their dioceses theologians who acquit themselves with honor their duty in expounding the Holy Books, and that she neglects no opportunity of encouraging and supporting them.

But, to return to Bibles translated in the vulgar tongues; it is long since pastors found themselves necessitated to turn their at-

tion particularly to the versions current at secret conventicles, and which heretics labor at great expense, to disseminate.

Hence the warning and decrees of our predecessor Innocent III., of happy memory, in the subject of lay societies and meetings of women who had assembled themselves in the diocese of Metz for objects of piety and the study of the Holy Scriptures.—Hence the prohibitions which subsequently appeared in France and Spain, during the sixteenth century, with respect to the vulgar Bible (*relativement aux Bibles vulgaires.*) It becomes necessary, subsequently to take even greater precautions, when the pretended Reformers, Luther and Calvin, daring by a multiplicity and incredible variety of errors, to attack the immutable doctrine of the Faith, omitted nothing in order to seduce the faithful by their false interpretations and translations into the vernacular tongue which the then novel invention of printing contributed more rapidly to propagate and multiply. Whence it was generally laid down in the regulations dictated by the Fathers, adopted by the Council of Trent, and approved by our predecessor Pius VII., of happy memory, and which (regulations) are prefixed to the list of prohibited books, that the reading of the Holy Bible translated into the vulgar tongue, should not be permitted except to those to whom it might be deemed necessary to confirm the faith and piety. Subsequently when heretics still persisted in their frauds, it became necessary for Benedict XVII., to superadd the injunction that no versions whatever should be suffered to be read but those which should be approved of by the Holy See accompanied by notice derived from the writings of the Holy Fathers, or other learned and Catholic authors. Notwithstanding this, some new sectarians of the schools of Jansenius, after the example of the Lutherans and Calvinists, feared not to blame these justifiable precautions of the Apostolical See, as if the reading of the Holy Books had been at all times, and so indispensable that no authority could assail it.

But we find this audacious assertion of the sect of Jansenius withered by the most rigorous censures in the solemn sentence which was pronounced against their doctrine, with the assent of the whole Catholic universe, by two Sovereign Pontiffs of modern times, Clement XI., in his *unigenitus* constitution of the year 1713, and Pius VI., in his constitution *auctorem fidei*, of the year 1794.

Consequently, even before the establishment of Bible Societies was thought of in the decrees of the Church, which we have quoted, were intended to guard the faithful against the frauds of heretics, who cloak themselves under the suspicious pretext that it is necessary to propagate and render common the study of the Holy Books. Since then our predecessor, Pius VII., of glorious memory, observing the machinations of these societies to increase under his pontificate, did not cease to oppose their efforts, at one

time through the medium of the Apostolical nuncios, at another by letters and decrees, emanating from the several congregations of cardinals of the Holy Church, at another by the two pontifical letters addressed to the Bishop of Gnesen and the Archbishop of Mohilif. After him, another of our Holy Predecessors, Leo XII., reprov'd the operations of the Bible Societies, by his circulars addressed to all the Catholic Pastors in the universe, under date May 5, 1824. Shortly afterwards, our immediate predecessor, Pius VIII., of happy memory, confirm'd their condemnation by his circular letter of May 24, 1829. We, in short, who succeeded them, notwithstanding our great unworthiness, have not ceased to be solicitous on this subject, and have especially studied, to bring to the recollection of the faithful, the several rules which have been necessarily laid down with regard to the vulgar versions of the Holy Books.

We have good cause, however, to rejoice, venerable brethren, inasmuch as supported by your piety, and confirm'd by the letters of our several predecessors, which we have referred to, you have never neglected to caution the flock which has been entrusted to you against the insidious manœuvres of the Bible Societies. This solicitude of the Bishops, seconding with so much zeal the solicitude of our Holy See, has been blessed by the Lord. Already several imprudent Catholics who had gone over to these Societies, enlighten'd at last to their objects, having separated themselves from them forever, and the remainder of the faithful, with very few exceptions, have escap'd from the contagion by which they were threaten'd.

The partizans of the Bible Societies little doubt'd in their pride but that they could at least bring over the unfaithful to the professions of Christianity by means of the sacred books translated into the vernacular tongue—moreover, they took care to disseminate them by innumerable copies, and to distribute them every where, even amongst those who wanted them not, at the hands of their missionaries, or rather, their emisaries. But the men who strove to probagate the Christian faith, independently of the rules establish'd by Jesus Christ himself, have only succeed'd in increasing the difficulties of the Catholic Priest, who, clothed with the mission of the Holy See, goes amongst the unfaithful and spares no fatigue in order to conquer new children for the Church, either by preaching the divine word or by administering the sacraments—always prepar'd, at all events, to shed his blood for the salvation of souls and the testimony of his faith. Amongst the sectarians of whom we are speaking, deceiv'd in their hopes, and in despair at the immense sums which the publication of their Bibles costs them, without producing any fruit, some have been found, who, giving another direction of their manœuvres, have betaken themselves to the corruption of minds, not only in Italy, but even in our own capitol. Indeed, many

precise advices and documents teach us that a vast number of members of sects in New York, in America, at one of their meetings, held on the 4th of June last year, have formed a new association, which will take the name of the Christian League (*Fæderis Christiani*), a league composed of individuals of every nation, and which is to be further increased in numbers by other auxiliary societies, all having the same object, viz: to propagate amongst Italians, and especially Romans, "the principles of Christian Liberty," or, rather, an insane indifference to all religion: These, indeed, confess that the Roman Institution, as well as Italian, had in bygone times so much influence that nothing great was done in the world but had its origin in our august city. Not that they ascribed the fact to the Pontifical See, which was then founded by the disposition of God himself, but verily to some remains of the Roman power, subsequently usurped, as they say, to our predecessors who succeeded in that power.

This is why, determined to afford to all people "Liberty of Conscience," (or, rather, it should be said liberty to err,) from which, according to their theory, must flow as from an inexhaustible source, public prosperity and political liberty, they think they should before all things win over the inhabitants of Rome and Italy, in order to avail themselves after of their example and aid in regard to other countries.

They hope to obtain this result easily by favor of the Italians scattered over the world. They flatter that on returning in large numbers to their country, and bearing with them, whether the exultation of novelty, corruption of manners, or the excitement of want, they would hardly hesitate to affiliate themselves to the League, and at least second it through venality. This society strains every nerve to introduce amongst them, by means of individuals collected from all parts, corrupt and vulgar Bibles, and to scatter them secretly amongst the faithful. At the same time their intention is to disseminate worse books still, or tracts designed to withdraw from the minds of their readers all respect for the Church and the Holy See. These books and tracts have been composed in Italian, or translated into Italian from other languages, with the aid of Italians themselves, and amongst these books should be particularly cited. "The History of the Reformation" by Merle d'Aubigue, and "Calender of the Reformation in Italy," ("Postes de la Reforme en Italie") by Jean Cric.—As for the character of these works, it is sufficient to know that, according to the records of the society of which we are speaking, the commission entrusted with the choice of books for publication cannot count upon more than one individual belonging to one and the same religious belief.

Scarcely were we made aware of these facts, but we were profoundly grieved on reflecting upon the danger which threatened not only remote countries, but the very centre of unity it-

self, and we have been anxious to defend religion against the like manœuvres. Although there be no reason to apprehend the destruction of St. Peter's See at any time, in which the Lord our God has placed the immovable foundation of his Church, yet we are bound to maintain its authority. The Holy duty of our apostolic ministry reminds us of the awful account which the Sovereign Prince of Shepherds will exact of us for the growing tares which an enemy's hand may have sown in the Lord's field during our sleep, and for the sheep which are entrusted to us, if any perish through our fault.

Wherefore, having consulted some of the Cardinal Holy Rô-mish Church, after having duly examined with them every thing, and listened to their advice, we have decided, venerable brothers, on addressing you this letter, by which we again condemn the Bible Societies, reproved long ago by our predecessors, and by virtue of the supreme authority of our apostleship, we reprove by name, and condemn the aforesaid society called the *Christian League*, formed last year at New York, it, together with every other society associated with it, or which may become so.

Let all know, then, the enormity of the sin against God and his Church, which they are guilty of who dare to associate themselves with any of these societies, or abet them in any way.—Moreover, we confirm and renew the decrees recited above, delivered in former times by apostolic authority against the publication, distribution, and reading, and possession of books of the Holy Scriptures, translated into the vulgar tongue. With reference to the works of whatsoever writer, we call to mind the observance of the general rules and decrees of our predecessors, to be found prefixed to the *index* of prohibited books, and we invite the faithful to be upon their guard, not only against the books named in the *index*, but also against those proscribed in the general prescriptions.

As for yourselves, my venerable brethren, called as you are, to divide our solicitude, we recommend you earnestly in the Lord, to announce and proclaim, in convenient time and place, to the people confided in your care, these apostolic orders, and to labor carefully to separate the faithful sheep from the contagion of the Christian League; from those who have become its auxiliaries, no less than those who belong to other Bible Societies, and from all who have any communication with them. You are consequently, enjoined to remove from the hands of the faithful alike the Bibles in that vulgar tongue, which may have been printed contrary to the decrees above mentioned of the Sovereign Pontiffs, and every book proscribed and condemned, and to see that they learn, through your admonition and authority, what pasturages are salutary and what pernicious and mortal.

Be more careful every day to see, my venerable brothers, also the Divine Word be preached not only by yourselves, but that

by the various other pastors and competent ecclesiastics in each diocess. Watch attentively over those who are appointed to expound the Holy Scriptures, to see that they acquit themselves faithfully, according to the capacity of their hearers, and that they dare not, under any pretext whatever, interpret or explain the Holy Pages contrary to the tradition of the Holy Fathers, and to the service of the Catholic Church.

Finally, as it is the part of a good Shepherd not only to protect and feed the sheep that follow him, but also to seek and bring home to the fold those which wander from it, it becomes an undivided obligation on your part and on ours to use all our endeavors to the ends that whoever may have allowed himself to be seduced by sectarians and propagators of evil books, may admit under the influence of Divine Grace, the heinousness of his fault, and strive to expiate it by the atoning works of a salutary repentance.

We are bound not to exclude from our sacerdotal solicitude the seducers of our erring brethren, nor even the chief masters of impiety, whose salvation we should seek by every possible means, although their iniquity be far greater.

Moreover, venerable brothers, we recommend the utmost watchfulness over the insidious measures and attempts of the Christian League, to those who, raised to the dignity of your order, are called to govern the Italian Churches, or the countries which Italians frequent most commonly, especially the frontiers and ports whence travellers enter Italy. As these are the points on which the sectarians have fixed to commence the realization of their projects, it is highly necessary that the Bishops of those places should mutually assist each other zealously and faithfully, in order, with the aid of God, to discover and prevent their machinations.

Let us not doubt but your exertions added to our own, will be seconded by the civil authorities, and especially by the most influential sovereigns of Italy, no less by reason of their favorable regard for the Catholic religion than that they plainly perceive how much it concerns them to frustrate these sectarian combinations. Indeed, it is most evident from past experience, that there are no means more certain of rendering people disobedient to their princes than rendering them indifferent to religion, under the mask of religious liberty. The members of the Christian League do not conceal this fact from themselves, although they declare that they are far from wishing to excite disorder; but they, notwithstanding, avow that, once liberty of interpretation obtained, and with it what they term liberty of conscience amongst Italians, these last will naturally soon acquire political liberty.

But, above all, venerable brothers, let us elevate our hands to Heaven, and commit to God with all humility and the fervor of which we are susceptible, our cause, the cause of the whole

flock of Jesus Christ and of his Church. Let us, at the same time recur to the intercession of St. Peter, the Prince of Apostles, also to treat of the other Saints, especially to the Blessed Virgin Mary, to whom it has been given to destroy all the heresies of the universe.

We conclude with giving you with our whole heart, and as a pledge of our most ardent charity, the Apostolic blessing : to you all, our venerable brethren, and to the faithful, alike ecclesiastic and lay, committed to your jurisdiction.

Given at Rome from the Basilic of St. Peter, on the 8th of May, in the year 1844, and the fourteenth of our Pontificate.

(Signed)

GREGORY XVI., S. P.

ADDENDA.

READER, whoever thou art, whatever may have been your preconceived opinions, to whatever party you may belong, will you say that American Freemen, who prize liberty higher than life, should hear unmoved the thunder of this proud, insolent and arrogant Prelate, fulminating his decrees to a people in our midst, who implicitly believe in *his Divine Right* ?

Are you prepared to forego the sweet consolation which your Bible affords ?

Are you ready to join in this unholy crusade against Bibles and Bible Societies ?

Do you join in the sentiment that Liberty of Conscience, is "Liberty to err ?"

Have you forgotten the wicked and bloody persecutions of your Forefathers ?

Do you not believe that the Roman Pontiff is desirous of uniting Church and State, even in this our highly favored land ?

Fellow-Citizens, one who has no other interest in this question, except that which is common to all, asks you to reflect on this subject ; be not influenced by designing demagogues, who desire you to postpone political action for another year, their object is to crush forever, this effort of the oppressed against their oppressors, yet, another year and it may be too late. It is now high time to apply that peaceful, yet powerful remedy, *your Ballots at the Ballot Box*. This it is which will lengthen the term of Probation for the naturalization of Foreigners, who may hereafter come amongst us.

Your ballots will proclaim to the world that Native American citizens can govern themselves.

Will prevent all union of Church and State.

Will most effectually prevent the arrogant assumptions of the Roman Pontiff from affecting our Free Institutions.

And will transmit the rich inheritance of Free Government unimpaired, to your posterity.



